

The Restorative Power of AIR: The 2015 AIR Alumnae Survey

May 2015

Debra L. Holloway and Colleen L. Rielly

Executive Summary

When I first started as Executive Director of Arts In Reach (AIR) in January of 2014, I was overwhelmed by the number of parents, teens, guidance counselors, staff, and artists who told me such inspiring stories about how the program literally changed lives. I saw first-hand, the new teens on their first day, nervous and shy, barely able to speak above a whisper. At the end of each program, I was amazed to see these very same teens on stage performing for family and friends.

Founded in 1997, AIR has served over 500 teenage girls from Rockingham and Strafford counties. The 2015 AIR Alumnae Survey was our first AIR Alumnae Survey. It provided us with data that validates our 18 years of work.

This important project was funded by a grant from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation in October of 2014. We were also extremely grateful to our long-time AIR supporter, Debra Holloway, Ph.D., who volunteered her time to analyze the data and write the final report. Colleen L. Rielly also provided preliminary survey design and data analyses.

Our mission is to empower teenage girls through mentoring and the arts. Our survey data shows exactly that. Of the respondents, 90% gained self-confidence, 94% helped with personal skills and 88% helped with work skills. Participants build their own shows, write their own songs and poetry, and create artwork together. The program builds on life-long skills such as working as part of a team, communication, creative problem solving, and leadership.

AIR helps participants make informed and responsible decisions regarding alcohol, drugs, and sexual activity. While AIR does not cure behavioral and emotional disorders, it did help 60 to 70% of respondents manage and cope with depression, eating disorders, anxiety, self-harm, bullying, and suicide/suicidal ideation. When asked how did AIR impact your life, one respondent wrote four words, "I am still alive."

AIR does not advocate any political views, and yet 76% of respondents are registered to vote and 74% voted within the last two years. Teens learn that what they have to say is important and their voices are heard in every performance, song, poem, dance, and piece of art. The AIR alumnae also give back, with 63% volunteering at food pantries, schools, homeless shelters, and arts related organizations.

One of the most important findings is the impact not only on the alumnae but future generations. When asked if the arts are important to the growth of children, 96% say "yes," and 71% strongly agree they would want their daughter to be a part of the AIR program. As one respondent concludes, "I am who I am as a person, sister, daughter, mother and wife because of AIR."

We are excited to share our survey results. I think you will agree with me that AIR does indeed empower young women, making a positive difference in their lives.

Mary-Jo Monusky
Executive Director

Introduction

Tim Rollins, founder of K.O.S. and The Arts and Knowledge Workshop, once wrote, “The restorative power of art . . . is hope made manifest, vision made visible, and determination made visceral.” He argued that the arts help us “learn and make in ways that will affirm [our] unique identities and voices,” (Holloway and Krensky, 2001, p.353). Rollins description of the power of arts also describes the impact of Arts In Reach (AIR).

Recognizing the need to address the growing “crisis of confidence” (American Association of University Women, 1992; Brown and Gilligan, 1992) for adolescent girls, AIR was founded in 1997 as a summer integrated arts program (theatre, writing, and visual arts) for 10 girls in need at Dover Middle School. Past research on AIR documented its restorative power by showing how participation enabled these girls to express their voices and be heard, see new possibilities for themselves and others, and develop agency to pursue their life goals (Holloway, 2001). The 2015 AIR Alumnae Survey was the first comprehensive AIR alumnae survey to investigate the long-term impact of AIR’s programming on its participants. It revealed that AIR’s impact was deep and enduring. As one respondent said, “AIR made me a different person,” and another wrote, “I never stopped learning or growing at AIR.”

Over the past 18 years, AIR has evolved into a non-profit organization that annually serves 100 girls ages 13-18 from Southeastern New Hampshire. AIR’s mission is to empower teenage girls through mentoring and the arts by emphasizing positive relationships, healthy lifestyle coaching, and personal development through year-round after-school and vacation programming in performance, literary and visual arts. AIR makes these enrichment opportunities accessible to all participants by providing programs, transportation, healthy snacks, and supplies, completely free of charge. During programs, young women work with professional artists, create and participate in performances, and attend cultural events.

AIR programs are designed to heighten each young woman’s sense of self. Staff, artists, and volunteers offer participants an environment that nurtures the freedom to explore their creativity and voice through diverse mediums of art, including theater, dance, visual arts, singing, poetry and creative writing. Each program strives to engage girls to “take charge” of the artistic process by sharing their insights and having an active role in the development of that program’s final showcase. Participants build social skills, take on leadership roles, solve problems, and exercise creative thinking throughout the process.

AIR’s eight after-school and vacation programs include the following:

The Phenomenal Woman Project – Early-March to Mid-May

This annual after-school program is a journey of self-discovery, utilizing poetry and visual arts. The program employs different methods of empowerment and creative enrichment, as professional artists and volunteer mentors from the local community share their time and skills to help the girls create a final showcase of their work.

AIR Divas at the Mic – February vacation week

This winter vacation program focuses on music, singing, style, and performance. AIR teens will work together with professional musicians, singers, and dancers to prepare various pieces of contemporary and Broadway music to be showcased in a final performance.

AIR Divas on Stage – April vacation week

Timed with spring vacation, Air Divas on Stage provides AIR teens a chance to create an original show as they channel their skills in writing, dancing, and acting. It provides an opportunity for them to meet and work with local performance artists, culminating in an original showcase celebrating each teen's newly honed skills.

SummerWorks – Early July to Mid-August

This interdisciplinary, six-week-long arts program consists of three two-week-long segments: SongWorks, ArtWorks, and TheatreWorks. The program day runs from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, Monday to Friday. One or two field trips are built into each of the two-week programs as well.

1. **SongWorks** introduces AIR teens to the art of writing and recording songs. The projects include two large group songs, eight to twelve duets, and workshops in voice, songwriting, drum circles, and music genres. Several songwriters, musicians, and vocal instructors work with our teens to record their own original songs in a professional recording studio. SongWorks teens finish the program with a concert for family and friends.
2. **ArtWorks** allows AIR teens to create multimedia artwork working as a group, as well as individual pieces. Girls will have the chance to work in various media, visit local artist studios, and participate in a field trip to an art museum.
3. **TheatreWorks** offers AIR teens the opportunity to create an original play showcase. In addition to acting, the participants perform choreographed dance numbers. The program includes a field trip to see a professional theatre production.

Fall Programs – mid-October to mid-December

Two fall after-school programs run from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., two days a week, with some Saturday workshops and field trips.

1. **Theatre On AIR** explores several performance genres, such as improvisation, musical theatre, and performance art and storytelling, all intended to provide an environment that encourages AIR teens to find their individual voices through exploration of physical expression, vocal strength, and character development.
2. **Dance On AIR** is similar in purpose to Theatre On Air, except that it explores dance styles such as hip hop, musical theatre, jazz, and creative movement. There are no limits, and teens are encouraged to discover, once again, their creative potential as only the arts can provide.

In February 2015, AIR developed the 2015 AIR Alumnae Survey to further understand the long-term effects of these programs on its participants. The AIR Alumnae Survey examined both quantitative and qualitative factors as well AIR's emphasis on empowerment of young women through participation in the arts (Holloway, 2001). The survey included basic demographics of AIR alumnae, how many programs in which alumnae participated, prevalence of key risk behaviors that AIR works to combat, AIR's effect

on participant self-confidence, and maintaining relationships made during and after AIR. In addition 80% of survey respondents wrote comments on two open-ended questions regarding AIR’s long-term impact on participants. This survey explored the qualities that make the program unique and far reaching. The resulting data painted a picture of enduring impact on participants and revealed how AIR influences participants’ futures.

Survey Results

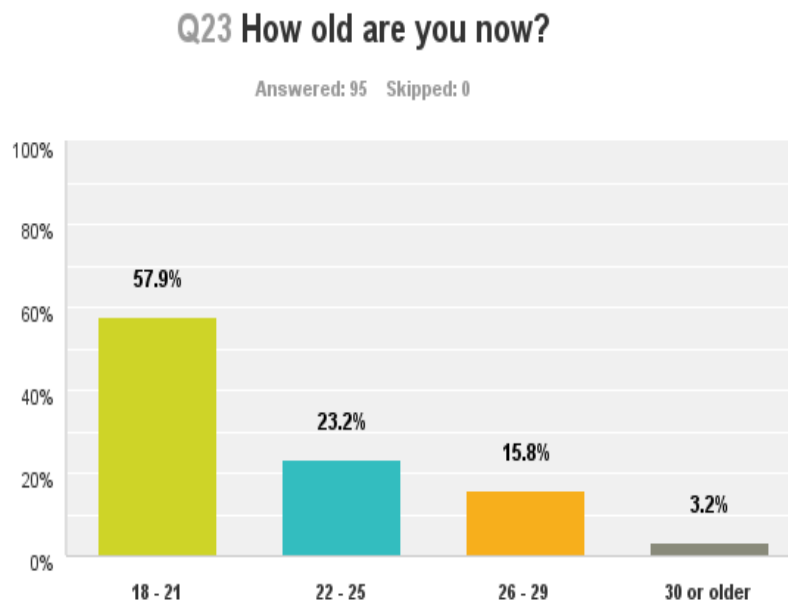
Sample

“I was able to gain exposure to things I never would have experienced otherwise.”

Of the 502 AIR alumnae, 365 were e-mailed surveys using Survey Monkey. As many as 137 (27%) had unknown e-mail addresses. Many of these alumnae had been living in group homes, may have moved out of state or married and taken a different last name. Ninety-five alumnae responded to the survey. The survey response rate was 26%.

Approximately 60% of responding alumnae were between the ages of 18-21. About 25% were between the ages of 22-25 while less than a quarter (19%) were 26 and older. The majority of respondents (63%) were single with no children, reflecting the 60% in the 18-21 year old category above. Close to 17% were married and 14% had children.

Figure 1



The date of respondents’ last AIR program was spread evenly across seventeen years. Responses from 1997-2006 make up between 1-6% each. In 2007 and 2008 there was a slight increase in response rate,

with 8% of respondents last attending AIR in 2007 and 10% leaving in 2008. The response rate for 2009-2011 participants remained consistent with previous years, with percentages between 6-9%. The major outlier in the data was the response rate for 2012 AIR alumnae at 17%, the largest group of respondents. Of respondents, about 30% completed only one AIR program. Seventy percent took part in more than one program, and of those, about 36% participated in two or three programs, which was the largest group. Eleven percent completed four to five, which was the smallest group. Twenty-five percent completed more than five programs.

Programs

“The programs I participated in taught me the beauty of working toward a common goal with other like-minded individuals. I learned to be less stubborn, less anxious, and less argumentative. I took safe risks and learned so much about myself.”

Initially alumnae heard about AIR through a variety of different avenues, but most suggested community outreach as a prevailing factor. Over half of AIR alumnae cited a guidance counselor or teacher as their source for learning about AIR (53%). One quarter indicated a friend who had participated in AIR (24%) told them about the program. Fifteen percent listed alternative ways of finding out about AIR. Some heard about the program through their parents, other community organizations. Many in this group indicated community outreach and presentations by AIR directors and staff.

In the 19 years since its inception, AIR programs varied based on on-going program evaluation with participants, parents, and staff. Programs evolved and improved over time drawing upon visual arts, photography, video, theatre, singing, dance and a combination of the arts. The survey data suggested that there was much variation among the programs in which responding AIR alumnae participated in as well.

Photography and Songwriting are the least common type of programs in which responding alumnae participated, with one quarter taking part in each type. Half of participants took part in a Singing program. Close to 60% of respondents participated in Creative Writing/Poetry, Visual Arts, and Dance Programs. The type of program that was most common among respondents was Theatre, with 74% having participated.

Half of the AIR alumnae answering the open-response question: “What is your most memorable AIR experience?” wrote about particular programs.

- “Performing a poem of mine with a group of girls while we all acted it out. We were on the stage of the Portsmouth Music Hall, and it was such an incredible experience to share my art in a public space.”
- “Writing a piece of performance poetry, adding choreography with my peers/mentors, and performing it with several other girls at the final showcase at one of the summer programs. It was so meaningful to me to be able to display my work on such a profound level with people I cared about so much.”

The mentors, field trips, and the end-of-program showcases and performances were integral aspects of the AIR experience that remained with participants after they left the program.

- “Working with all the local artists was definitely inspiring. It showed us what we could be in the future if we work hard enough.”
- “Going to the Isles of Shoals and seeing ‘Into the Woods’ at The Hackmatack Playhouse.”
- “Realizing, at our show, that I had created something worth exhibiting and that I had developed the courage to do so.”

AIR alumnae identified a number of enduring benefits from participating in programs, including: *personal and professional skills, improved relationships, strategies to avoid risk behaviors, leadership and community involvement, and continued pursuit of arts and education.*

Personal and Professional Skills

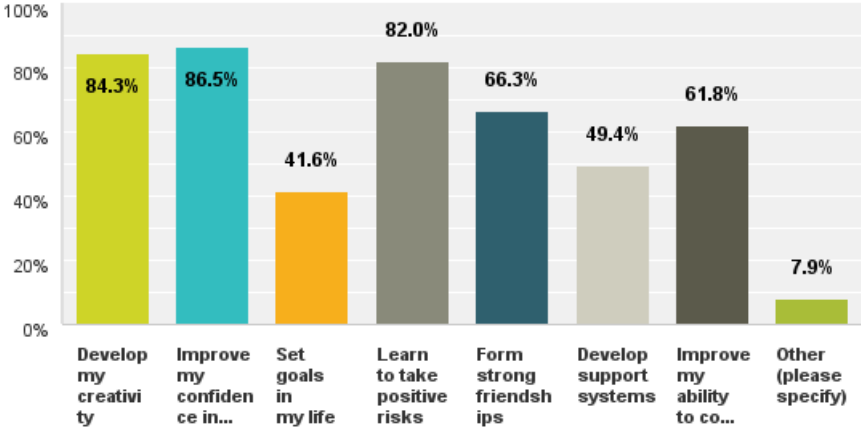
“I became more proud of myself and began my journey to self-acceptance in part due to participation in these programs.”

A key factor in empowering participants was increasing their self-confidence and the development of personal and professional skills. Eighty-six percent of AIR alumnae indicated that AIR had a positive effect on their self-confidence while 94% reported that AIR positively influenced their personal skills, and 88% said AIR positively influenced their professional skills.

Figure 2

Q10 Which personal skills did AIR help you with? (Please check all that apply.)

Answered: 89 Skipped: 6

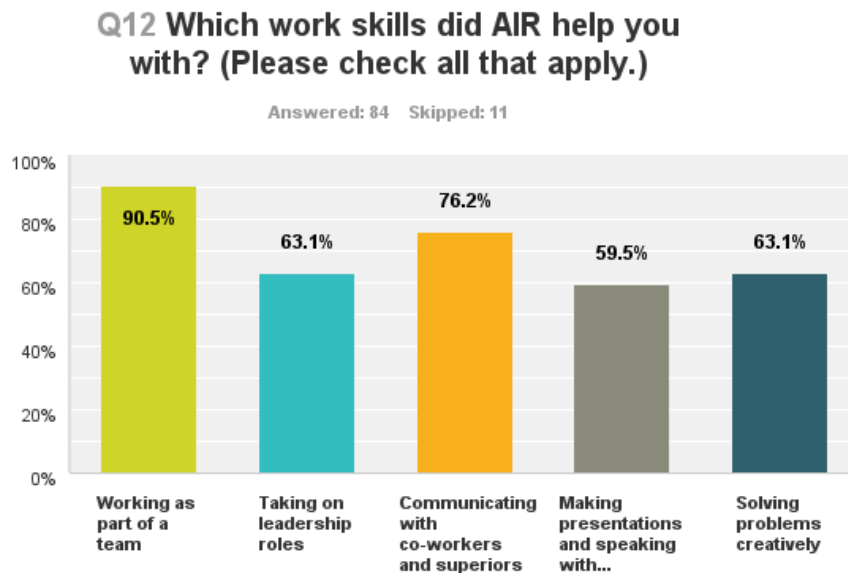


For the 94% of alumnae who reported that AIR helped them build on their personal skills, over 80% identified developing creativity, improving confidence in writing, art and/or performing skills and learning to take positive risks. Over half (50-65%) indicated that AIR helped them build strong

relationships, support systems, and the ability to cope with stressful life situations. Forty-two percent said that AIR aided them in setting life goals. These findings corresponded with previous research on participation in the arts showing an increase in academic achievement, creativity, fluency and originality in thinking, and feelings of self-worth (Catterall, Chappleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Heath & Roach, 1999; Holloway, 2001; Holloway and LeCompte, 2001).

In terms of the 88% who reported AIR influencing their professional skills, 60% indicated that AIR helped them with making presentations and speaking publicly. Sixty-three percent said AIR aided them in solving problems creatively and taking on leadership roles. Seventy-six percent suggested that AIR helped them communicate with co-workers and supervisors. Over 90% reported that AIR helped them improve their ability to work as part of a team.

Figure 3



Alumnae written responses revealed a fuller picture of the impact that AIR had on participants' personal and professional skills. For many, AIR was a place where they discovered themselves and their voices. Many respondents noted the confidence they gained as a result of participating in AIR.

- "Air fostered my creativity and helped me feel valued and valuable."
- "It was a place that I felt encouraged. A place where I learned new things. I was exposed to things I would never have had the chance to otherwise. AIR was a place that I felt inspired, a place that made me feel comfortable, a place that gave me hope for the unknown future. It was positive in every which way. It was a relief from the place I had to call home."
- "I think the most important way it impacted me was through my self-confidence. I am able to go into an interview with confidence. In my eyes, in middle school I was afraid to raise my hand. But in high school I grew enough confidence to raise my hand. And when it comes to college, it's given me enough confidence to answer questions asked by the professor, even if I think it may be wrong."

- “AIR gave me the confidence that I can use my voice and can be heard. I have often struggled with speaking up in various contexts, be it personal, educational, or professional, but in the time since I was involved with AIR, I definitely improved in this area.”

The survey results revealed that AIR programs helped participants find their voices and “be heard” which was consistent with previous research on AIR (Holloway, 2001). Overall AIR provided participants with an array of personal and professional skills that they developed and drew upon throughout their lives.

Improved Relationships

“Working to create art with many different people, creating a community with each other.”

Regarding the development of friendships and interpersonal relationships, AIR had a positive effect for the majority of alumnae surveyed. Over half (56%) of respondents stated they strongly agreed that they built strong friendships during their AIR programs while 26% somewhat agreed that they built strong friendships during AIR. Therefore over four-fifths or 82% of AIR alumnae built strong friendships at some level during their program participation.

The results were somewhat inconclusive regarding ongoing contact with AIR friends. About half of alumnae said they had regular (19%) or occasional contact (36%) with AIR friends while the other half indicated that they had rare or no contact at all with AIR friends. That being said, 24% of alumnae had rare contact and 21% had no contact with AIR friends. This could be because of external circumstantial factors in maintaining contact, such as changed phone numbers, e-mail addresses, moving or not having a vehicle to visit friends in other towns/cities.

Support from AIR friends was important. Whether participants remained close or not, that meaningful experience of close relationships remained with them and continued to sustain alumnae as they formed new relationships after participating in AIR. Over half of respondents reported that AIR effected their choices in friends or romantic partners (54%) while 25% said AIR helped somewhat. For 21% AIR made no difference. Yet many respondents wrote about the importance of the friendships and relationships they made while participating in AIR. Many also commented on the unforgettable and sustaining relationships participants formed with mentors:

- “The friends I made while participating in AIR, even if I am no longer in contact with any of them, were still good friends during the program.”
- “When I was having a hard time hitting a pitch while singing I kept giving up but all the girls kept pushing me to not give up. They were never judgmental; they supported me a lot.”
- “AIR has been important because not only did I gain friends and mentors that were very supportive, but it also taught me that people can be a stable thing in your life and when you need someone, regardless of how long it has been since you've seen or spoke to them, you can still always count on them.”

- “AIR exposed me to several positive, healthy, calm, enthusiastic, encouraging role models who helped me see myself as a person of value. My ideas, questions, mistakes, and solutions were met with interest and kindness in a way they had not been before AIR.”
- “AIR taught me how to interact more effectively with other people. Also, the mentors fostered a positive environment, so I usually felt included and safe at the programs.
- “We all drew this portrait of a river and a few trees around it, and at that time, I did not have much confidence in my drawing. Well, the final day was coming up where our parents could come and look at the artwork, and they asked if they could hang my portrait in the first room of the house where everyone could see. This made me feel a million times better about my work.”

Whether participants maintained ongoing relationships with other AIR participants, mentors, or guest artists, or not, alumnae retained positive feelings toward the people they had relationships with while participating in AIR. Many respondents also reported improved relationships with family members as a result of AIR. Overall AIR’s emphasis on building a community of artists among participants, mentors, and guest artists created an environment that supported healthy relationships during and after program participation:

Avoid Risk Behaviors

“AIR has helped me make positive decisions in my life, regarding not using drugs/alcohol in a negative way and building positive relationships with friends and significant others. I also have felt more confident about myself since participating in AIR.”

AIR worked to emphasize the importance of taking healthy risks and to decrease the prevalence of risk behaviors and mental health challenges among its participants through positive mentoring and increasing participants’ self-confidence. This research aimed to understand the prevalence of risk behaviors and mental health challenges of participants during their time in AIR and after their participation.

The degree to which AIR influenced whether respondents engaged in sexual activity, drinking alcohol, smoking or using marijuana depended on whether individuals were faced with making choices regarding these behaviors. For those who were, 19-29% indicated that AIR definitely influenced their decision regarding these behaviors and approximately 30% reported that AIR somewhat influenced them. Combined 48-58% felt AIR helped them negotiate these risk behaviors while 42-52% said that AIR made no difference in their choices regarding these behaviors.

The extent to which AIR helped participants manage or cope with risks behaviors and conditions indicated how influential AIR had been on its participants. While about half of respondents (47%) stated that eating disorders did not apply to them, 62% reported that AIR helped them with facing eating disorders. Thirty-four percent said that AIR definitely helped them cope and 28% reported it somewhat helped them manage. Though 38% indicated AIR made no difference.

In regard to self-harm, 39% stated that the behavior did not apply. Of those who faced the issue, 68% indicated that AIR helped in some way while for 32% AIR made no difference. The survey revealed similar results for alumnae who confronted anxiety, bullying and suicidal thoughts/attempts.

For those experiencing depression, AIR proved helpful. Seventy-six percent indicated that AIR helped them with depression. Forty-three percent said AIR ‘definitely’ helped and 32% indicated ‘somewhat,’ while 24% reported AIR did not help.

Figure 5

Did AIR positively influence you in making informed and responsible choices?			
	Definitely influenced	Somewhat influenced	Made no difference
Drinking alcohol	21%	27%	52%
Smoking	29%	29%	44%
Using marijuana, prescription drugs, or other drugs	28%	30%	42%
Engaging in sexual activity	19%	32%	49%

Figure 6

Did participating in AIR help you to manage/cope with the following during junior high /high school?			
	Definitely influenced	Somewhat influenced	Made no difference
Eating disorders	34%	28%	38%
Self-harm	35%	33%	32%
Depression	43%	33%	24%
Anxiety/panic attacks	37%	33%	30%
Bullying	36%	36%	28%
Suicidal thought/attempt	37%	31%	33%

For those alumnae experiencing risk behaviors and conditions, AIR appeared to support a large majority, 62-76%. Many AIR alumnae responded similarly as the following comments:

- “AIR impacted my life in an incredibly positive way because it got me back on the right path for me.”
- “AIR occupied my time in a positive and enriching manner, while at a young age. It is very important for children to have a positive influence like A.I.R., showing them how to spend their time constructively while building healthy memories.”

Leadership and Community Involvement

“The most memorable memory I have is when I first felt ‘truly important.’ It was the first time I got to really help someone else, give them advice, and mentor them... Instead of being the mentored, the tables were turned and I felt amazing about it.”

Approximately two-thirds of AIR alumnae continued leadership development and community involvement after the program. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported that AIR helped them take on leadership roles. For many alumnae AIR made them leaders:

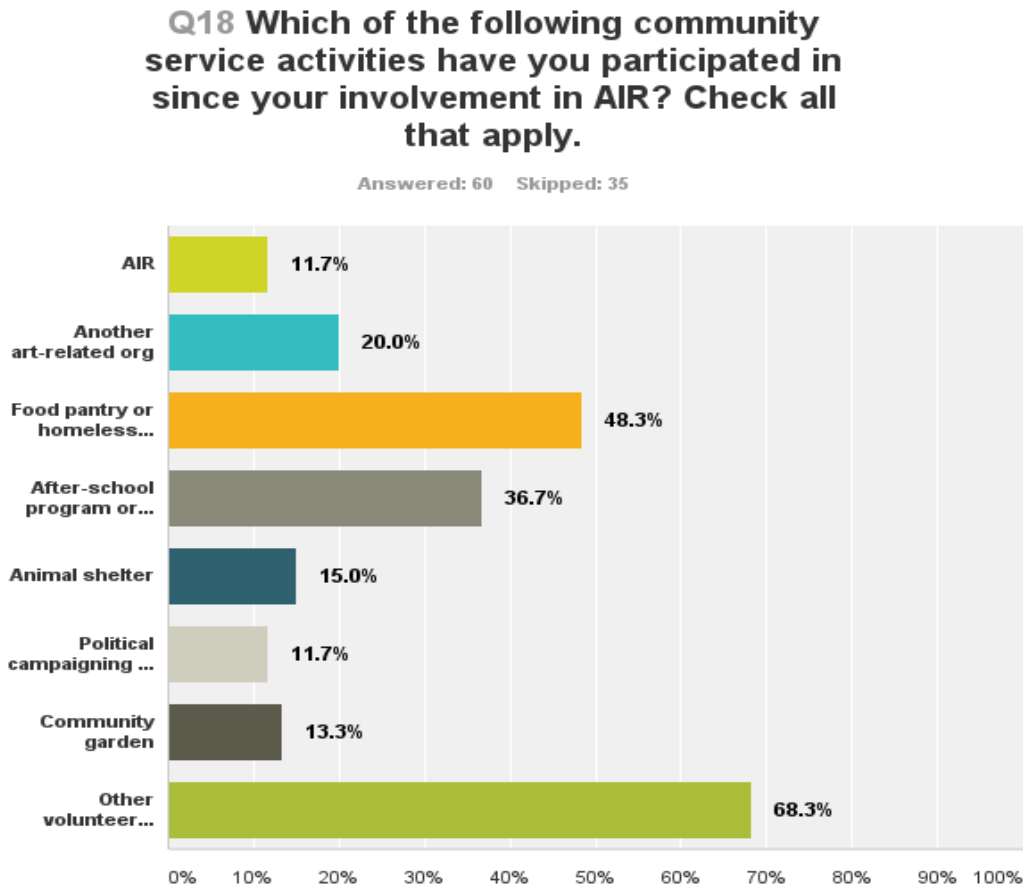
- “I began to use art to ease my anxiety and pain, at AIR and on my own. I went from a socially anxious girl, sitting in the corner writing in my notebook at programs, to an AIR apprentice, leading workshops and mentoring younger girls. I got something new out of every program I participated in. I never stopped learning or growing at AIR.”
- “The anxieties I overcame and leadership skills I gained have made me a hard and meticulous worker at school and at my jobs, and has made communicating with adults and my peers so much easier. I continue to use the artistic, social, and interpersonal skills I learned at AIR in my daily life now. AIR was a beautiful part of my school years and made my life so meaningful at that time.”

Similarly 63% of respondents indicated involvement in volunteer community service since participating in AIR. AIR alumnae volunteered in a variety of community service activities. Half who volunteered worked in a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, and 36% volunteered in an after school program or summer camp. Approximately 68% of respondents took part in some “other” volunteer activities. According to The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2012) at Tufts University’s Johnathan M. Tisch College for Citizenship and Public Service, in 2009 of 19-24 year olds only 16% in New Hampshire and 28% nationally volunteered or did community service. The percentage of AIR alumnae who remained committed to performing community service was significant.

Additionally, AIR alumnae tended to be more actively engaged citizens than was typical for Americans their age. Over three quarters (76%) of survey respondents were registered to vote, and 74% voted in an election in the last two years. These findings closely resembled national voter turnout statistics for Americans 65 and older (72% in 2012) as opposed to those for 18-29 year olds (45% in 2012 and 21.5% in 2014), according to The Center For Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2014).

These findings reflect those of Catterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson (2012) who analyzed data from four large-scale, longitudinal, national data sets to study how students’ level of arts participation during their K-12 years related to academic achievement and civic engagement in their post-secondary years. They found that especially for students from low socio-economic status backgrounds—like AIR girls—students with high participation in the arts had the highest increases in academic outcomes and civic engagement in their post-secondary years.

Figure 4



Continued Pursuit of Arts and Education

“AIR actually got me interested in video production. AIR shaped my entire career. I did the first ever film program and decided to go to college for video production and now I work at WMUR!”

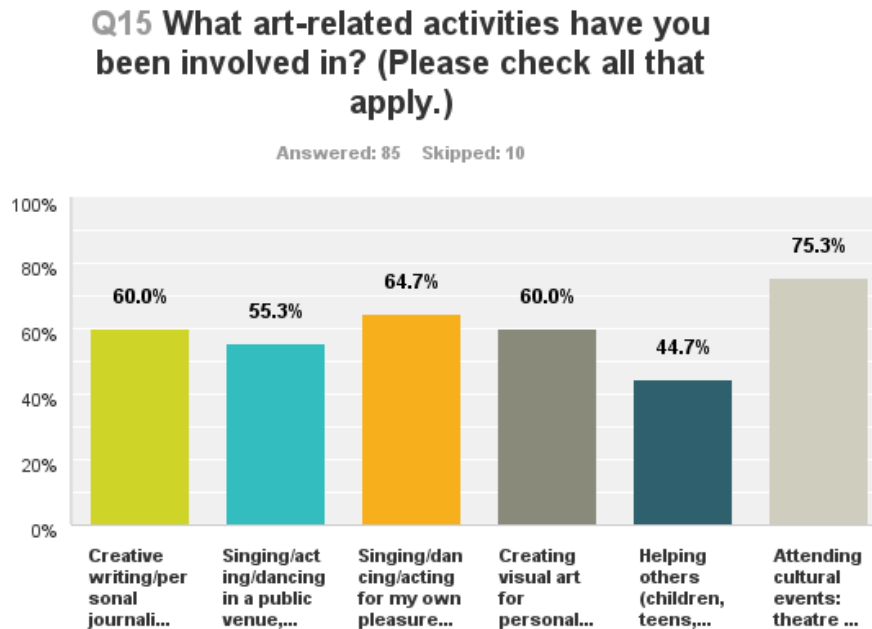
Another key factor in AIR’s approach to programming was to instill an appreciation and desire for involvement in the arts after participation. The results strongly indicated that AIR alumnae were involved in a variety of arts-related activities post-AIR.

Over 75% of respondents reported that they attended cultural events. Sixty-five percent said they sang/danced or acted for friends or family. Sixty percent were involved in creative writing, journaling or poetry; 60% created visual art for personal pleasure; 55% engaged in a public production; and 45% helped others develop arts and performing skills.

Of the 25% who reported that they were not involved in arts activities, 75% were not doing so because they lacked the time due to other work and school commitments, and 42% said they did not have an interest in the arts. The survey results also showed that 96% of AIR alumnae believed that the arts were

important in the personal growth of children while 71% strongly agreed that they would want their daughters to be a part of an AIR program.

Figure 7



Many alumnae also reported that AIR directly influenced their chosen education and career paths. AIR alumnae were in varying stages of educational and professional positions upon their completion of the survey. Approximately 70% of respondents were pursuing their education. Ninety-three percent had at least a high school diploma, and close to 30% had completed a technical/vocational program, a two year degree, a four year degree or post-graduate work. These data reflected the age of the women in the survey sample.

One-third of AIR alumnae had full time employment. Of these, approximately one quarter had occupations otherwise not indicated in the survey, such as nanny, special education teacher and dog walker. Fourteen percent were in semi-skilled fields and 12% were in healthcare. Approximately one quarter of respondents worked in the field of education, childcare or social services. Another quarter reported that they worked in fields otherwise not represented in the survey, such as full-time student, graphic design and trying to start their own business.

Nearly 38% of respondents had a yearly income of \$14,999 or under, reflecting the high percentage of alumnae still pursuing their education and the age distribution of the sample. Close to 15% had a yearly income of \$20,000 to \$29,000, and 13% earned over \$30,000. A third of respondents preferred not to provide income data.

Figure 8

Q27 Which of the following best describes the type of job you do? (Please select one answer only.)

Answered: 95 Skipped: 0

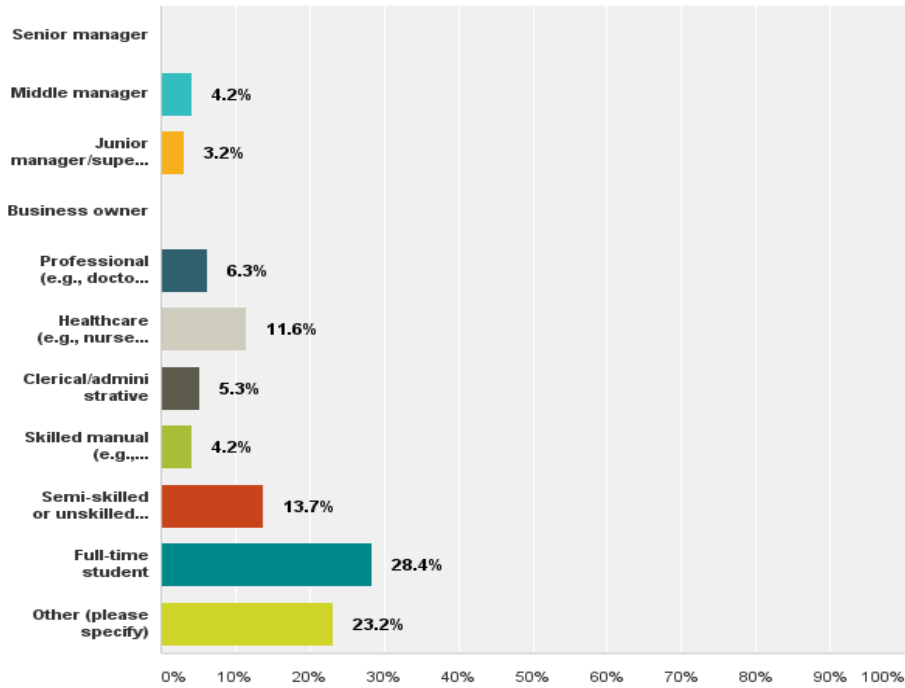
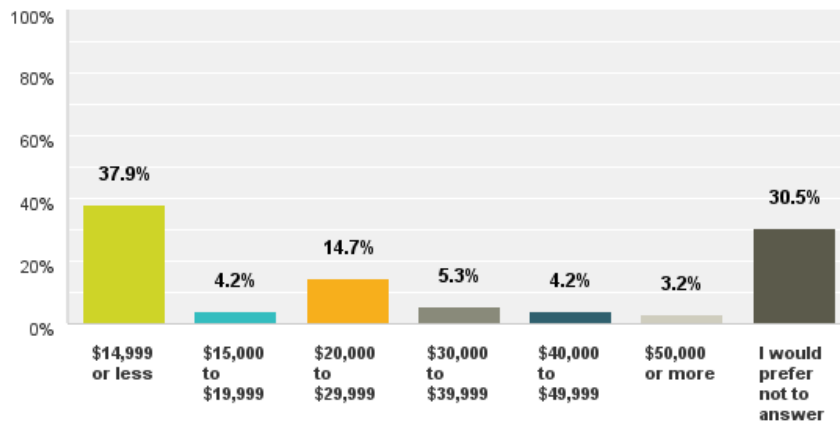


Figure 9

Q29 What is your total annual income, not including that of your spouse or partner?

Answered: 95 Skipped: 0



Many AIR alumnae provided written comments that summarized the enduring impact of AIR on their lives:

- “Coming from the ‘projects’ it was really great to feel like I was part of something better, and I didn't have to be defined by where I came from OR what gender I was. AIR made me more passionate about exploring many different activities and not caring if it was thought of as a male activity or a female activity. It made me stronger in my convictions and helped me handle peer pressure throughout my life. I've never felt like I've Needed to fit in anywhere, I can just be myself. I think that is my most favorite part about being in AIR.”
- “I never thought of myself as an art girl until I did the program. Now 15 years later, art is the center of my life. I can see the beauty in everything. I met my best friend in AIR and we talk every day. I am who I am today because of the impact that AIR had. The program really gave me a foundation to build my identity on at such a pivotal age. I honestly feel like AIR gave me a positive outlet during my adolescence into young adulthood. Through AIR, I found something that motivated me, inspired me, and helped shaped me into who I am today. Definitely the best memories of growing up was in AIR.”

Conclusion

The results of the 2015 AIR Alumnae Survey suggested that with the combination of a strong emphasis on the arts, empowerment of young women and creating strong and supportive relationships, AIR created safe and inspiring places for young women to foster *improved relationships, personal and professional skills, leadership and community involvement, and continued pursuit of arts and education*. Participants became confident and involved members of both their personal and professional communities. As they journeyed toward empowerment, expression, and success, AIR played an indelible role.

AIR consistently provided high-quality arts programming for teenage girls who may not otherwise ever have afforded similar opportunities. These results were consistent with those found previously (Holloway 2001). Participation in AIR increased participants’ acquisition of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993; Holloway, 2001; Kisida et.al, 2014) and social capital (Holloway, 2001) as well as guided participants in how to use these to change their lives.

Sociologists define cultural capital as forms of knowledge, both tangible and intangible, that have value related to status and power in a given society. AIR serves adolescent girls lacking in opportunities to acquire cultural capital due to economic and social factors. The cultural capital gained through AIR—engagement in various arts, with artists, and arts institutions—increases participants’ social capital at AIR, home, school, and throughout their lives. This social capital--in the form of skills and techniques for interacting more effectively in social relations and in relation to risk behaviors--increases their sphere of influence and network of lasting relationships (Holloway, 2001).

By providing opportunities to acquire cultural and social capital through meaningful arts-based experiences and relationships, AIR has an enduring impact on young women and propels them toward new personal and professional goals. AIR alumnae have high rates of on-going education, healthy life choices, community volunteerism, and voter engagement. As one alumna asserts, “I am who I am as a

person, sister, daughter, mother and wife because of AIR.” Another declares, “I still am alive” because of AIR.

In Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis, Robert Putnam (2015) argues that the key to our future as a country is closing the “opportunity gap” between those who have ample opportunities in their lives for growth and success and those who do not. AIR provides opportunities for gaining the cultural and social capital necessary for participants to enact future possibilities for their lives. AIR helps close the opportunity gap for its participants and, simply put, changes their lives.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Catterall, J. S., Chaoleau, R., and Iwanaga, J. (1999). Involvement in the arts and human development: General involvement and intense involvement in music and theatre arts. In E. B. Fiske (Ed.), *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning (pp.2-8)*. Washington, D.C. The Arts Education Partnership and The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

Catterall, J.S., Dumais, S.A., and Hampden-Thompson, G. (2012). The arts and achievement in at-risk youth: Findings from four longitudinal studies. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts.

Heath, S.B. and Roach, A. (1999). Imaginative activity: Learning in the arts during the non-school hours. In E. B. Fiske (Ed.), *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning (pp.2-8)*. Washington, D.C. The Arts Education Partnership and The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

Holloway, D.L. (2001). *Authoring Identity and Agency through the Arts*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Colorado, Boulder.

Holloway, D.L. and LeCompte, M.D. (2001). "Becoming somebody! How arts programs support positive identity for middle school girls." In D.L. Holloway, and B. Krensky (Ed.), *Education and Urban Society: The Arts, Urban Education, and Social Change*. 33, (4), 388-407.

Kisida, B., Greene, J.P., and Bowen, D. (2014). Creating Cultural Consumers: The Dynamics of Cultural Capital Acquisition. *Sociology of Education* XX(X) 1-15.

Putnam, R.D. (2015). *Our Kids: The American Dream In Crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rollins, T. (2001). Foreword. In D.L. Holloway, and B. Krensky (Ed.), *Education and Urban Society: The Arts, Urban Education, and Social Change*. 33, (4), 351-353.

The Center for Information And Research On Civic Learning And Engagement. (2012). Volunteering/Community Service. www.civicyouth.org.

The Center for Information And Research On Civic Learning And Engagement. (2014). Youth Voting. www.civicyouth.org.